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SUBJECT: DARFURI CIVIL SOCIETY AND FORMER REGIME OFFICIALS PUSH FOR USG ENGAGEMENT WITH SUDAN, RECONCILIATION IN DARFUR

REF: A) KHARTOUM 153

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11. (SBU) Summary: In meetings with Senior Representative for Sudan Tim Shortley and CDA Fernandez, Darfuri civil society leaders and retired government officials pressed for greater U.S. diplomatic involvement in engaging directly with the GOS to solve the Darfur crisis. With Darfuris fed up that "the war in Darfur has become wars for Darfur," as one participant put it, a broad range of participants in the meetings expressed hope that the upcoming Qatari initiative will succeed. But while peace talks may reconcile the mostly Zaghawa factions still at war with Khartoum, civil society participants bemoaned the GOS's attempt to stifle the work of Darfuri organizations, further exacerbating tribal differences and reducing the chances for true grass-roots reconciliation. End summary.

The Arab Perspective

12. (SBU) In a meeting with SPG Shortley and CDA Fernandez on February 3, Southern Rizeigat Arab leader El Waleed Madibo explained that ethnic polarization in Darfur can be ameliorated with international support for a dialogue in Darfur free of NCP meddling. Madibo described Arabs in Darfur as "trapped," aware that the GOS "misused and betrayed" them, and angry that the GOS has not shared its wealth with the Darfuri Arab populace. He said that by coercing the NCP regime to accept the legitimacy of the Darfur-Darfur dialogue, the U.S. can encourage Darfuris to tackle the "militarization of identity" plaguing their region. As director of the independent Sudanese NGO Governance Bureau, Madibo suggested that the US should support a trip of Darfuri civil society leaders, including key non-Janjaweed Darfuri Arabs, to the United States to meet with policy makers and subsequently return to Darfur as a positive public diplomacy initiative.

Former Regime Officials Urge U.S. Engagement

13. (SBU) Assembled at the home of former North Darfur governor Ret. Gen. Ibrahim Suleiman (fired by President Bashir in 2002 for objecting to arming Arab tribesmen) on February 4, a group of retired GOS officials and Sudanese intellectuals told Shortley and CDA that U.S. diplomatic engagement with the GOS and Darfuri rebels, on the level of dialogue conducted to conclude the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), can bring about positive change in Darfur. Al-Shafie Ahmed Mohamed, a retired ambassador and former Secretary General of the NCP, said that it is unlikely the CPA itself would go forward without a satisfactory resolution of the Darfur problem, but U.S. involvement is necessary to achieve a breakthrough similar to the CPA. Retired General Siddiq Mohamed Ismail echoed sentiments in

the room supporting the Doha negotiations, calling the Qatari initiative a true opportunity to bring peace and security to Darfur. Mohamed Mahmoud Haroon, an NCP member and professor of social sciences at the University of Khartoum, said that the situation in Darfur at this moment is conducive to ending fighting, as all parties are "fed up" that "the war in Darfur has become wars for Darfur." According to Haroon, the paradigm shift that U.S.-Sudanese relations underwent during CPA negotiations brought about a complete political shift in Sudan, as the NCP agreed to form the Government of National Unity with the SPLM. Haroon envisions a similar shift taking place in Sudan should the U.S. be inclined to engage the GOS on Darfur and CPA implementation.

Civil Society Perspective

¶4. (SBU) Meeting with CDA and Shortley on February 4, a Khartoum-based group of civil society activists insisted that peace in Darfur is possible if the GOS begins permitting Darfuris to negotiate among themselves. Dr. Mousa Adam, a well-known Darfuri civil society leader with the Darfur Civil Society Forum (DASICF), said, "The ways of solving our own problems exist, but things get out of hand with the interference of a third party." With Darfuri Arabs marginalized to the point of having no representative, Adam and DASICF are currently reaching out to give Arab tribes the opportunity to "come out of the enclosure the government has put them in." Outreach to Arab tribes will reassure Arab tribes they will not be punished for the crimes of the janjaweed, while also rejuvenating the now-defunct idea of unity among Darfur's many Arab and African tribes. Eltaishi Mohamed, a Darfuri leader from the Arab Ta-ashir tribe, likewise supported outreach to Arabs to revive the concept of peace through unity. "The rule of the gun has failed to deliver peace and solutions for unity. The only way to create the old idea of unity in Darfur is through the path of civil society," Eltaishi said.

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¶5. (SBU) Although DASICF would like to begin outreach to non-warring tribes in Darfur, activists told Shortley and the CDA that the space for Darfur civil society organizations is restricted in the same way that the GOS restricts humanitarian operations in Darfur. With true Sudanese NGOs not permitted to operate, Waleed Madibo asked CDA if the U.S. could coerce the GOS to permit independent civil society organizations to operate in Darfur. Concerned that this restriction will prevent the voice of the "silent majority" of Darfuris from being heard at the upcoming talks at Doha, Mousa Adam warned, "Any peace agreement not bought by the silent majority will be a failure, and will not filter down to the villages. There were more IDPs after Abuja than before. Partial peace is no peace."

¶6. (SBU) Comment: One of the underlying themes of these meetings was the desire of the Sudanese to see greater diplomatic engagement from the United States. Participants were hopeful that American diplomacy could contribute to an end to the violence in Darfur, recognizing that significant pressure/incentives must be applied/offered to the regime to encourage the kind of political shift that occurred following the signing of the CPA. Unfortunately, much of the level of suggestions revolves around talking, rather than doing (or changing policies) by the regime. Although intellectually and morally well-positioned to promote peace and reconciliation, independent civil society organizations in Darfur mostly suffer in silence, with no real mechanisms to protest the GOS's restrictions on their operations. Post recommends increasing support for Darfuri civil society organizations such as DASICF, who can contribute to the dialogue about Darfur's future in a way that armed movements cannot, and will become increasingly important once peace is achieved. Unfortunately, the bloodletting by both cynical rebel movements and a ruthless regime continues. End comment.

¶7. (U) Senior Representative Shortley did not clear this cable prior to his departure from Sudan.

FERNANDEZ